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ABSTRACT

One small but relatively vital program of the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, Title III (Strengthening Institutions), is generating extensive discussion. Title III is a federal grant program that was authorized in 1965 to strengthen colleges and universities that serve non-traditional students. To be eligible, colleges must demonstrate the need for funds, serve an underrepresented student population, and apply in a rigorous and competitive application process. Title III funds have been most effective in creating organizational change within institutions of higher education with relatively few dollars. Its structure and the current application process result in significant, long-term institutional effects which have, in turn, successfully responded to the transitioning learning needs of students, the community, the nation, and the economy. The cost-effectiveness of Title III can be seen in statistics about minorities and the cost per student for the 43 current California community colleges. This cost-effectiveness benefit contrasts with direct student aid funding at $1500 to $3500 per student, as is provided by Pell grants and TRIO programs, for which benefits are student-specific annual amounts and do not accumulate for future students. By providing an education that features programs that are continuously being developed to be responsive to ever-changing national and community needs, the federal government can contribute to the health and fabric of the country. (HAA)

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The Case for Title III

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The Case for Title III

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As the administration, Congress, and their many constituents ready to enter deliberations for the Higher Education Reauthorization Act, one relatively small but vital program, Title III Strengthening Institutions, is generating extensive discussion and a variety of questions. Many ask:

- "What is the value of this program?"
- "How cost-effective is it?"
- "Should federal education funds be redirected?"
- "Why does this program merit federal support?" "Aren't these grants covering costs which are part of routine state funding?"
- "Does this program duplicate programs funded under other federal higher education programs?"

But most importantly, "WHAT is it, and what does it DO?" This paper describes Title III, Part A and its cost-effective capacity to transform higher education institutions.

What Is Title III?

It is clear that a better understanding of this program and the needs which the program addresses would be helpful to decision-makers. This unique program does not lend itself easily to sales pitch slogans and political rallying cries; rather Title III, Part A is responsive to important and complex educational, economic, and societal issues. Simply put, federal Title III funds are for the purpose of strengthening the capacity of postsecondary institutions to better educate low-income and minority students.

Title III Strengthening Institutions is a federal grant program that was authorized in 1965 to strengthen colleges and universities that serve "non-traditional" students. The program is divided between Part A for higher education institutions that serve low-income minority students, and Part B for historically black colleges. Part A now has additional funds separately appropriated for colleges in which at least 25% of full-time students are Hispanic (called Hispanic-serving institutions, or H.S.I.s).

In the 1995-96 fiscal year, Title III Part A provided $80 million to 193 public and private colleges in 45 states. In funding year 1996-97, only $55.4 million, plus $10.8 million for H.S.I.s, was allocated for existing Part A grantee colleges. Part B funding was unchanged, however, from 1995-96.

The Higher Education Reauthorization Act, which structures the parameters of Title III, will be up for renewal in fiscal year 1997-98, and legislative discussion began in 1996-97. In the mean time, at the request of Congress, Title III and other authorized higher education programs are being studied and standard program performance indicators are being developed. Mathtech, Inc., a research consulting firm, is leading this effort for the Department of Education in regard to Title III programs.

Key types of higher education grant programs supported by the federal government include:

- Direct grants to low-income individuals (financial aid)
- Outreach programs which provide direct services to disadvantaged populations with special needs (e.g., Title IV's TRIO)
- Project grants to groups to foster innovation in higher (FIPSE)
- Development grants to strengthen colleges (Title III)

Title III supports college-wide development projects that are not covered by individual student aid grant funds such as Pell grants and TRIO programs. State dollars, on the other hand, are used primarily for operations, and are rarely available for college-wide development purposes.

To establish eligibility to apply for a Title III grant, accredited higher education institutions must first demonstrate need for the funds and serve a student population that is underrepresented in higher education. Colleges have priority if they enroll over 60% minority students. Community colleges, the two-year colleges that are still the major port of entry to college for low-income students, represent 75% of Part A grantees. Over 620,000 minority, low-income students are currently enrolled in Part A colleges throughout the country.

For the rigorous and intensely competitive application process, colleges must analyze their strengths and weaknesses and submit an informed and detailed five-year comprehensive development plan. This plan describes how grant funds will be used to achieve measurable objectives which are fashioned to overcome the college's weaknesses and maximize its strengths. Furthermore, a strong case must be made that the funds will provide long-term impact on the college, that funds will increase access and success for underrepresented students, and that the

successful initiatives implemented will be institutionalized. Strategies to strengthen academic quality, improve institutional management, and increase fiscal stability can all be developed and implemented at eligible institutions via Title III funding.

For Part A colleges, the five-year grants of about $340,000 per year provide seed money for new systems or programs that support student success and strengthen college management. For example, a college might automate enrollment data for managers, add automated early warning systems by which counselors will be notified quickly when students are facing academic difficulty, or create computer kiosks with which individual students can check their academic progress towards degrees. They could also set up model basic skills learning programs for academically underprepared students or computer laboratories that train students and faculty to use computer-assisted technology. The five-year funding period is critical to the development of long-term systems and infrastructures that substantially change the way that colleges serve students. K. Patricia Cross, a frequent spokesperson for reform in higher education, notes that ". . . colleges need development funding such as Title III to make long-lasting structural changes needed for non-traditional students" (personal interview, 1996).

What Is the Value of Title III?

Title III, Part A funds have been most effective in creating organizational change within institutions of higher education which is responsive to the needs of the community and country. These institutions were originally charged with perpetuating and passing down an unchanging, stable national culture. The mission, however, has changed dramatically to one of responding to changing societal and educational needs.

As recently as a generation ago, higher education was organized to educate a small fraction of the population. Since that time, as a result of democratization, a philosophical shift has taken place whereby higher education has undertaken the role of providing broad access and lifelong learning. This is particularly true for the nation's community colleges that have embraced the challenge of educating the under-employed, those underrepresented in higher education, and the growing number of students. The need for lifelong learning also became more critical as the demanded skills of the job market were upgraded to maintain an advanced national industry, technology, and economy.

Most recently, this mandate for broadening the higher education mission as well as the convergence of a number of factors have enhanced the imminent need for continuing change and

institutional transformation in higher education. The huge numbers of new immigrants to the U.S., the rapid growth of an ethnically and culturally diverse population, a deep recession and budding recovery, the requirements of a recovered, changed economy--all have necessitated a major restructuring of the educational system. As a result of unprecedented economic and demographic change, never before has the need for educational reform been as profound and required such radical shifts as today.

However, changing the direction, structure, or culture of a university or college system is no small charge. Title III, Part A dollars have been strategically managed, through stringent regulations, stiff competition for funds, and follow-up and monitoring, to have the capacity to change institutions with relatively few dollars. The structure of Title III and the current application process result in significant, long-term institutional impacts which have, in turn, successfully responded to the transitioning learning needs of students, the community, the nation, and the economy.

Take for example four California community colleges who recently completed the last year of a five-year Title III college-consortium grant. They had assessed their institutions' weakness as that of an inability to successfully teach first-generation (of their family to attend college) ethnic minority college students using the traditional teaching and learning paradigm by which many of us were schooled. By conducting research, they learned that K. Patricia Cross' and Tom Angelo's classroom assessment techniques employed by college teachers improves academic success for this growing group of students. They began to implement classroom assessment techniques projects during the first year of their grant (1989), and since then large numbers of the faculties of these four colleges have converted their teaching styles. The very nature of the teaching and learning cultures of these four colleges has changed as well; their colleges are generally more receptive now to new ideas, change, and innovation, and they have since implemented a variety of new programs. Non-traditional student success rates at these colleges are on the upswing, as measured by grades, retention, and persistence to graduation. And many of these faculty have been asked to train faculty at other colleges throughout the country. All this with a relatively small amount of money!

Alex Sanchez, once president of a Hispanic-serving community college in California that received a Title III grant, knew the potentially transformative capability of Title III grants. He encouraged staff at the New Mexico College where he is the new president to apply for one and

says, "The careful planning that must be done in order to be competitive to receive Title III monies ensures that, if funded, you have a project with maximum, long-lasting, strategic effects."

Title III's Cost-Effectiveness. An Example From California Community Colleges

In the 43 current California community college Title III, Part A institutions alone, 578,000 students are now enrolled. Of these students, 64% are ethnic minority and thus not among those traditionally served by higher education. When all 578,000 students at those colleges access Title III-developed services and benefit from the institutional strengthening, the cost per student will be $126. However, the cost-effectiveness of Title III programs doesn't stop here; advantages accrue to additional students in each subsequent year after grant funding terminates, as programs are permanently established and institutions are strengthened. At the end of a five-year grant, programs which have been established with Title III seed money are institutionalized. Newly trained and upgraded faculty are in place and new state-of-the-art equipment has been purchased, for which the colleges then assume operational fiscal responsibility.

This cost-effectiveness benefit contrasts with direct student aid funding at $1500 to $3500 per student, provided by Pell grants and TRIO programs, for which benefits are student-specific annual amounts and do not accumulate for future students.

In this California example, the numbers of students who will be served in one year, after Title III projects are developed, by the type of Title III-funded program, are shown below.

336,712 students given access to strengthened student support services and new support programs

359,933 students given access to instruction from faculty with new instructional skills and new curricula

232,176 students given access to new instructional technologies

152,970 students given access to programs which enhance basic learning skills

333,038 students given access to specialized teaching and learning initiatives

173,417 students in colleges with strengthened administrative and management information systems for improved decision-making and performance

234,813 students in colleges with strengthened resource development and college advancement programs for improved college support

The above example was derived by evaluating the types of development activities now underway. (Note that students will be served by more than one type of Title III program.)

Conclusion

Yes, it is imperative that direct student aid programs be maintained to enhance access to higher education for low-income and underrepresented students. However, the question naturally follows, "access to what?" Access provides little value unless higher education institutions provide relevant and authentic educational programs. To do so means that colleges and universities of the 21st Century must remain continually responsive and in a state of transition. Development must be ongoing. Operational activities of higher education, thus, need to be heavily augmented with strengthening and developmental efforts. Therein lies the case for Title III: these programs are crafted in such a way that they are extremely effective in organizational development and fostering change.

No, Title III does not duplicate innovative initiatives such as those supported under FIPSE. Rather, Title III, Part A assists grantee institutions to take proven new curriculum and instructional strategies, such as some of those developed under successful FIPSE projects, and integrate them permanently into classrooms and across curriculums at colleges which serve high numbers of diverse and low-income students. Neither is there duplication of services between Title III, Part A and TRIO programs. Title IV's TRIO programs provide a safety net of services to a few hundred low-income students at one college. Title III provides funds and training for the development and implementation of new permanent services to also increase the retention and success of hundreds of thousands of low-income, minority students not fortunate enough to be part of the select group chosen for participation in a special services project.

And, why should these programs be federally funded? In educating individual students, as we all know, a larger purpose is served, that of creating a strong democratic nation and viable communities. By providing an authentic education, one that features programs that have been continually *developed* to be responsive to ever-*changing* national and community needs, the federal government can contribute to the health and fabric of the country.

Statistics/Sidebars

Title III & Hispanics

- In 1994, 23% of the California community college enrollment was Hispanic. This represents an 86% increase from 1984.
- Between 1984 and 1994, Hispanic student college enrollment increased from 525,000 to 1.2 million nationwide, a 127% increase.
- By 2030, the U.S. population is projected to be 19% Hispanic and 14 African-American.
- Of Latino students who go on to higher education, 54% begin at a community college.
- California's population includes 25 million Hispanic--by far the largest number of any state in the nation.
- In 1995-96, 49 California colleges and universities received approximately 1.7 million in Title III funding.
- 75% of Title III grantee colleges are community colleges.